

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Wilderness Working Group Meeting Minutes
August 6, 2002

Attendees:

Joe Keys	Kris Hjelle	Catherine Robertson
Belle Chesnick	Wade Johnson	Jane Ross
Terry Gray	Dave Price	Bill Schapley
		Julie Stotler

Greetings and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Working Group Discussions

The Working Group considered group size limits and decided to focus on initiating a permit system. Attempts could be made to limit group sizes through educational materials suggesting limits. Wade Johnson, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Interpretive Specialist, could send out a brochure emphasizing the BLM web site, if inquiries are made about group size issues.

Terry Gray expressed concern with large groups bypassing the BLM. Wade suggested coming up with a number less than 25. There was concern with outfitters' abilities to accommodate large groups, but Wade felt that most outfitters are responsible. Others in the group did not agree with this position.

Joe Keys thinks that a permit system may be a good approach, especially if group sizes become a problem. Someone commented that a permit system might negatively affect the Wilderness experience. The distance from the river to Rattlesnake Arches is a limiting factor, as it is a long hike from the river. It may be best to educate people at this time, rather than implement specific regulations. Suggestions could use non-specific language encouraging group sizes of less than 25 individuals within the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA), and even less in the Wilderness area itself.

Joe asked if he had 26 people in a group whether it would taint his reputation as an outfitter. The response was that these are only guidelines. If large groups want to use the area, perhaps they should just be told that specific locations are inappropriate. There was concern with implementing a double standard by managing group sizes in this way.

According to Bill Schapley, 12 is a “standard” number. Several group members expressed the need to be consistent. Dave Price feels that a permit system will be necessary in the future. Bill asked that whoever feels most strongly about the group size issue draft the recommendation, and Joe will do this.

Bill asked the group about prioritizing the other items for discussion.

Such items as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Division of Wildlife (DOW) on game management, trail system adequacy, and road and trail maintenance were mentioned. Concerns are that time is running short with meetings set to end in late September. The group agreed that everything does not need to be addressed, but care should be taken to make recommendations regarding the bigger issues.

The size of the trail system was discussed, and the Front Country trail system is larger. Terry provided a synopsis of some of the horse trails. Catherine Robertson, BLM Grand Junction Field Manager, asked if there are adequate east-west trails, since these are difficult to develop because of the canyons. Some of the existing double-track trails need to be rehabilitated.

Wade encouraged the group to closely examine the trail system and whether it is adequate for the Wilderness. Kris Hjelle would like to see a policy statement addressing short-cut trails and erosion, with barriers and restrictions implemented to reduce and/or prevent further damage to the land. Terry added that equestrians try to educate those people causing damage.

It was proposed that both Dave and Wade work on a draft recommendation together, and the group could then revise it as necessary. Wade asked whether a trail needs to be designed for Devils Canyon, and whether other issues exist for the Colorado National Monument.

Bill indicated that group members are interested in the trail system, and two more meetings are scheduled. The first meeting in September should be spent on brainstorming and related discussions. The September 17 meeting could be dedicated to talking about the trail system.

Wade asked whether the two cabins in Devils and Flume Canyons have any historical value, especially since the cabins are associated with Will Minor.

Terry hopes to fix the roof on the Devils Canyon cabin this fall, and the equestrian community wants to see the cabin remain. People use the cabin for shelter, even during the winter months.

Wade expressed a concern with fire potential and asked the group about what the appropriate use should be for the cabin. Structures in the Wilderness are not typically used for recreation. Does the group want to make recommendations on this issue?

There was some discussion about another location and the 100-year flood plain. Bill inquired about the old fence lines and power lines in Devils Canyon, and Wade stated that they are gone.

Wade feels the Working Group should make recommendations, such as the amount of use and human waste disposal, for the cabin. Wade's opinion is that the cabin belongs in the Wilderness but use should be discouraged. Bill suggested that someone draft this recommendation. Bill stated that the problem lies not with losing the cabin; but instead, with loving it to death. It was added that weather would be a major contributor to the cabin's damage.

Someone asked about another cabin in the wild horse area and whether overnight camping should be prohibited. Someone will write up items regarding cabins.

The group was asked to watch for e-mails from the BLM regarding the hunter access road field trip. Bill briefly recapped some of the group's recommendations to date, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.